

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

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TEHRAN POUCH TO SHIRAZ AND ISFAHAN

FOLLOWING REPEAT MANAMA 1174 ACTION SEOUL INFO DHAHRAN DOHA

JIDDA KUWAIT SANA TEHRAN SECSTATE 14 AUG 1976

QUOTE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE MANAMA 1174

E.O. 11652 : N/A

TAGS : EALR, EFIN, ELAB, SA, BA, KS

SUBJECT : KOREAN LABOR IN BAHRAIN

REF : (A) DHAHRAN 1008 (B) SEOUL 6284 (NOTAL)

(C) MANAMA 930 (NOTAL, BEING REPEATED SEOUL)

1. THE NUMBER OF KOREAN WORKERS IN BAHRAIN HAS NOT YET
REACHED SUCH PROPORTIONS AS TO LEAD BAHRAINIS TO CONSIDER
THEM A PROBLEM OF THE SORT THAT MAY BE BREWING IN THE
EASTERN PROVINCE OF SAUDI ARABIA (REF A). THERE ARE
PRESENTLY ABOUT TWO THOUSAND SOUTH KOREANS WORKING IN
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BAHRAIN. TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, ALL ARE WORKING

FOR HYUNDAI CONSTRUCTION CO. WHICH IS ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH ITS CONTRACT TO BUILD THE MAJOR, OPEC-FINANCED, ARAB SHIP-BUILDING AND REPAIR YARD (ASRY). WORK IS REPORTEDLY RUNNING AHEAD OF SCHEDULE WHICH IF NOT UNPRECEDENTED, IS CLOSE TO BEING SO IN THIS AREA.

2. THAT SAID, HOWEVER, WE ALSO HEAR SOME OF THE COMMENTS AND SENSE SOME OF THE AMBIVALENT FEELINGS LOCAL PEOPLE HAVE TOWARD THE KOREANS --WHO, AS IN SAUDI ARABIA, ARE RESPECTED AND FEARED FOR THEIR HARD WORK AND EFFICIENCY. ON THE ONE HAND, AND THEIR QUASI-MILITARY APPEARANCE AND ORGANIZATION, ON THE OTHER. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE ASKED THE CHARGE AS RECENTLY AS LAST WEEK IF IT WERE TRUE THAT THE KOREAN WORKMEN ARE SECONDED TO HYUNDAI FROM THE MILITARY AND ARE THUS A KIND OF LARGE SCALE PEACE CORPS, WORKING FOR VOLUNTEER WAGES AS A NATIONAL SERVICE.

3. BAHRAINIS ARE NOTABLY RELAXED ABOUT THE FOREIGN LABORERS IN THEIR MIDST (SEE REF C) AND USUALLY THE FOREIGNERS FEEL SIMILARY. THE KOREANS, AS A GROUP, HAVE PERHAPS BEEN THE MOST STANDOFFISH (THEY ARE ONLY JUST BEGINNING TO FREQUENT THE LOCAL BARS AND SPEND THEIR FRIDAY HOLIDAYS SPENDING IN THE SUQ). THAT CULTURAL TRAIT, PLUS THE FACT THAT THEY ARE ISOLATED IN THEIR CONSTRUCTION SITE AWAY FROM THE MAIN POPULATION CENTERS OF BAHRAIN, HAS GIVEN RISE TO SEVERAL FANTASTIC BUT PERHAPS ILLUMINATING STORIES. ONE OF THE MOST EXTREME IS THAT THEY (AND THEIR FELLOW WORKERS IN KUWAIT AND SAUDI ARABIA) ARE THE ADVANCE SHOCK TROOPS FOR THE AMERICAN TAKEOVER OF THE GULF IN THE CASE OF ANOTHER ARAB DECISION TO DENY PETROLEUM TO THE WEST.

4. ANOTHER FACTOR WHICH MAY SEEM STRANGE IN SEOUL IS THAT THERE IS A LOCAL CULTURAL PREJUDICE AT PLAY. MOST BAHRAINIS, AS WITH OTHER ARABS, KNOW OF THE FAR EAST AS THE LAND OF KUNG FU, BRUCE LEE, KARATE, ETC. THIS THEY LEARNED IN THE LOCAL CINEMAS (BEFORE SUCH MOVIES AND THE POPULAR CLUBS WHICH TAUGHT THOSE SPORTS WERE BANNED BY THE GOVERNMENT AS BEING POTENTIAL THREATS TO PUBLIC ORDER). FOR MANY OF THE YOUNGER BAHRAINIS THEREFORE EVERY KOREAN IS A WALKING BRUCE LEE. THEY BOTH LIKE IT AND FEAR IT.

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5. NOTE: WHILE THE HYUNDAI WORKERS FIRST SPENT EVEN THEIR LEISURE HOURS (WHAT LITTLE THERE SEEMED TO BE) IN THEIR OFFICIAL WORK UNIFORMS, THEY NOW APPEAR IN PUBLIC IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES AND IN TWOS OR THREES RATHER THAN THE GROUPS OF TEN AND TWENTY WHICH WAS THE CASE EARLIER.

6. COMMENT: IF THE KOREANS ARE LOOKING FOR SOME GRATUITOUS

ADVICE IT WOULD BE THIS: IF THEY'RE INTERESTED IN A LONG-TERM
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GULF, TEACH THEIR WORKMEN SOME ARABIC
AND ENGLISH AND LET THEM (ENCOURAGE THEM TO) MINGLE INDIVIDUALLY
WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION. BURLEIGH UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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